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The current structure is abusive not only for the thousands of students, their parents and teachers, who are subject to punitively high levels of stress, but also for the rest of us California taxpayers, who will have to shoulder the lifetime social and financial burdens of each cohort of students who dropped out, tuned out, or successfully developed the obsolete skills needed to fill in the bubbles on a multiple-guess test and to write without needing to blot or scratch out with their fountain or quill pens.

The goals of the CAHSEE (as I understand them) are admirable: to ensure that each California student is presented with an education of high standards that prepares her for the future. Current high-stakes testing practices accomplish the opposite. They discourage creative problem-solving, take away opportunities for students to broaden their base of experience (through arts, sports, and extracurricular activities) and build a foundation on which to structure real solutions to problems we have not yet dreamt of.

Current tests and procedures divert time and energy from developing collaborative and leadership skills and into solutions to rote problems of the past that can be expressed in a single dot. In real life in the 21st Century many of these problems are better addressed by intelligent use of technology, which is nowhere addressed in the tests and therefore given short shrift in instruction. These tests demean individual talents and skills, treating each cohort of potential graduates as a single, undifferentiated statistic with no potential of having unique insights aptitudes that will add value to their personal lives and to the life of their community. The "best and brightest" are those most encouraged to depart from this kind of system.

As my peers in the Agriculture sector say, "You don't fatten lambs by weighing them." In our zeal to develop a better measurement device, we have lost track of why we wanted to do the measurement in the first place and are blocking out multi-dimensional reality to gauge the all qualities our "lambs" by a single standard whose most salient quality seems to be that it is easy for non-educators to understand. This is unfair to students, teachers and to all the people of one of the world's largest economies. No wonder California has fallen from first in the nation in education to the bottom or near bottom on all measures of educational efficacy.

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